THE CIRCUS THAT NOBILITY ENTERTAINED

It Was a "Flying Circus" From America, and This Spring It Gave the Japanese Their First Glimpse of Real Stunts in Midair

By Adachi Kinnosuke
American Correspondent of the Tokio Jiji

EARLY in April, an American flying circus landed in Tokio and improved on that old historic pleasantry of Cæsar's. For it came, this "ready for the clouds" fraternity, and it conquered Nippon, unlike the ancient Roman, without even taking the trouble to see very much of it. More than that, it took Tokio by a regular typhoon.

That you might gauge the height and measure the breadth of its triumph, pause long enough to look at one of the accompanying photographs—the one which shows the members of the flying circus ranged on both sides of our old Marquis Okuma. This might not strike some of our American friends as anything that would call for a feature story. Still, to some of us heathen, it is quite as sensational as it would be if a lot of Japanese acrobats were entertained at dinner at the Astor mansion on Fifth Avenue. There should not be the slightest quarrel over this fact. Old Marquis Okuma looms as high in the social firmament of Tokio as Newport society in America. The old marquis is one of the still surviving Older Statesmen who wrought that political miracle known as the New Nippon.

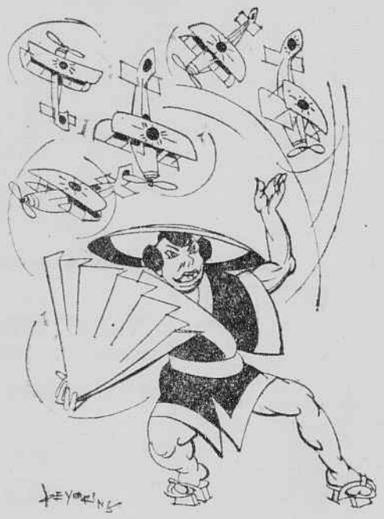
Mind you, these American flyers were backed by no government. Some members of the circus had flown over the muddy gray of the battlefront of Italy, and to one of them, at least, the topography of No Man's Land was once a common sight. But in Tokio, in the cherry blossom month of this year, they were simply on a commercial visit. The flying circus charged from 50 sen to 5 yen for entrance fee to aerial entertainments. And they gave their first show at Susaki Aviation Field in the most business-like manner imaginable. But no aviation corps of any great power could have received a more distinguished consideration, both from the government and people of Japan, than this Barr's Flying Circus from Los Angeles. The leading lights of the Foreign Office were there; high officials of the army and navy of Japan were more than well represented there, and of course, the officers of the Aviation Bureau of the two services. As for the common people of Tokio, they mobbed and flooded the Susaki Aviation Field, which is not a small place; and they crowded into it by 10 o'clock in the morning when every mother's son of them knew that the event was to begin at 1 in the afternoon.

But why all this lionizing of American flyers by the high and lofty social moguls of Tokio? Why all this tremendous and tumultuous reception of the Nippon mob for them? There is a reason for it; in fact, there are two reasons.

In the first place, the happy Nipponese had never seen in all their born days just such a reckless flirtation with the clouds and with death as the American flyers indulged in so cheerfully. They had seen few birds fly as high as the Americans went—never had seen them (the birds) enjoy their fun as much as the flyers did. As a matter of history, the most reckless stunt they had ever seen before the coming of the flying circus was what Mr. Nakayama did on March 6, 1921. On that day our proud twenty-one-year-old aviator

PHOTOS BY K. ADACHI

An airship picture without an airship, but with an impressive unanimity of upturned faces



stood on the right wing of his Curtiss biplane and looked down upon the capital city of Nippon with the air of one who had just chopped off the head of a dragon. And the people of Tokio nearly gasped at the sight of the daring young airman. Under the circumstances it is not very difficult to conceive just what the people of Tokio thought and felt when they saw "Babe" Barr—a star performer of the show, but a slip of a girl barely out of her teens—execute a pretty little dance on the wing of her plane. They had seen something like that in imported movies, but the world of movies to them was a world of impossibilities and of breath-taking barbarism of the Occident—that and nothing more. This astounding novelty of the performance was unquestionably one of the reasons for the unprecedented impressions the flying circus made on the minds of the people of Tokio. But by no means the only one.

A deeper explanation lay in the history of the development of aviation in Japan. In 1911 two Japanese army officers returned from France; there they had been taught how to fly. And the two officers were the first bird-men of Japan. That is another way of saying that the art and science of flying in Nippon is young. An American flyer, Art Smith by name, visited Japan in 1916. What he did in the air with his plane made the Japanese spectators ill. He showed some of the aviators of Japan just how odious is this thing we call comparison. Before his coming some of the Japanese flyers sported about with their heads rather high in the air—like so many bats in an island of no birds, as an old saying goes. But with the advent of the American flyer nothing of the sort was possible. More or less heroic officers of yesterday turned into so many unconscious walking jokes of to-day. And then, too, both the people and the army of Japan were then hearing a lot about the things which the German and the Allied airmen were doing along the fighting front in France. The upshot of it all was an appropriation of 600,000 yen in the governmental budget of 1916-'17 for the purchase of thirty or forty machines. It was no fault of the Japanese flyers that aviation had been so ridiculously backward in Japan. Wonder was quite on the other side. They had no machines except a few old, broken-down Morris-Farman biplanes. There were no aviation schools worthy the name in the country. There was no factory in the entire empire capable of turning out a single airplane motor; not a single plant that could turn out a flying machine.

A flight at Susaki Field, Tokio

Nothing, in fact, tells of the stunted condition of Japan's aviation quite so eloquently as this pathetic appropriation of 600,000 yen. Thing are mending a good deal of late, of course. In the budget just passed the Imperial Diet one aviation item of the navy alone calls for the expenditure of 7,000,000 yen and the army is about to establish an aviation station on Lake Biwa at the expenditure of about 7,000,000 yen also.

The first aviation corps of the army was established as early as 1915, but it was not even independent at the time it was tacked on to the engineers' corps. Now it has attained the status of an independent service composed of four battalions; one of them is stationed at Tokorozawa aviation field near Tokio, another at Kagamigahara, and another at Yokkaichi, and the last at Tachiarai. The first military aviation school was opened in January, 1920, and commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers made up the major portion of its 100 students. At the end of 1920 the army was reported to have about 600 airplanes, most of which were purchased from France, England and the United States. The flying corps of the navy is based at the two great naval ports of Japan, Kure and Sasebo. The navy is doing better than the army, as far as the construction of planes is concerned. Its shops have turned out a number of seaplanes of the Farman type. Admiral Kato, the Minister of the Navy, speaking before the fortieth session of the Imperial Diet, said that the aviation program of the navy called for the completion of 140 planes by March, 1923.

All this appears to eyes accustomed to the American and European skies like the pace of a lame snail—this story of military aviation in Japan. When it comes to the development of our civilian flyers and their achievements it's worse—much worse, in fact. Two years after the great war had demonstrated in the most sensational and impressive manner the vital part aircraft are destined to play in the struggles of human races both in war and in commerce—that is to say, at the end of 1920—it was reported that Japan had about thirty civilian flyers of more or less ability and experience. As a bare statement it is almost shockingly incredible. Thanks to the persistent and skillful propaganda of her enemies and of her friends, the efficiency of the Japanese army has been overrated beyond all recognition. And our air service suffers from the same cause.

Take, for example, the case of our air mail. There has been enough big talk on the theme among the Japanese—especially our newspapers—to inflate a couple of million Zeppelins. But in this year of grace 1921, months and months after American air mail men measured the North American continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific in 25 hours 21 minutes of actual flying time, and weeks after a woman flyer flew over the Andes from Mendoza, Argentina, to Chile, the establishment of a regular air mail from Tokio to Osaka is still in the realm of bombastic adjectives. It's an excellent material for a comic opera, and why a latter-day Gilbert and Sullivan has not turned it into an up-to-date "Mikado" is not quite clear.

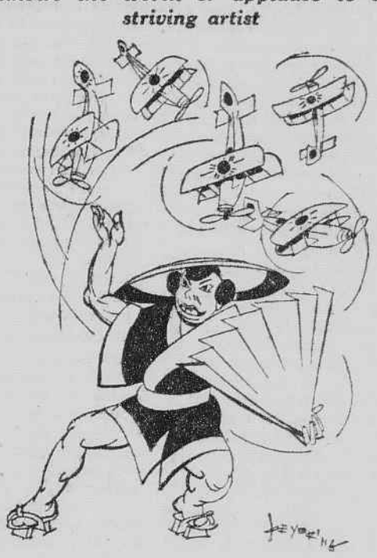
Just what, then, is the matter with Japan—who or what is clipping her wings, or what sort of millstones are thrown about her neck? First of all, up to the end of 1920, we have not had a single plant in the whole of the Nippon Empire which could turn out even fairly practical airplane motors; not a single solitary factory which could manufacture either airships or planes. It was, indeed, just a few weeks ago that the two great shipbuilding plants of the empire, the Mitsubishi people and the Kawasaki interests, have—out of sheer shame, no doubt, rather than from prospect of immediate profits in the enterprise—taken up the manufacture of aerial engine.

The Mitsubishi engineers, for some time past, had been experimenting with an engine at their Kobe plant. Now the company has established a new plant at Nagoya to which it has moved the entire engine construction department of the shipbuilding yard from the Kobe plant. And this new plant is to devote itself largely to the manufacture of airplane engines. As for the Kawasaki dockyard, its president, Mr. Matsukata, has just passed through New York on his way to Europe. He had already dispatched Lieutenant Hioki to France to examine carefully what that country has done since the war in the construction of airplanes. And on the present trip Mr. Matsukata is to devote himself entirely to the study and purchase of machinery and material necessary for the building of aerial engines and planes. Both the army and the navy of Japan are heavily interested in the activities of the two companies as far as their aircraft departments are concerned, for both of them are to build scouts and bombers and other type of aerial craft for the government.

In addition to the lack of machines and shops to build them, Japan suffers from the lack of flyers, as has already been indicated. The future is not altogether black in this respect, however. There are a few definite promises of a better day to come. The Military Aviation School has been training sixteen civilian cadets, six of whom were intrusted to it by the Imperial Aviation Association of Japan. The navy has not, however, admitted any of the civilian students into its flying school until recently. But according to a recent report a new ruling on this point will be put into practice. The lack of naval flyers has been a popular target of naval critics of Japan for some time past, and the sea lords of Japan feel it quite as keenly as any wordy outside critic—infinitely more so, in fact. In November of 1920 an interesting thing happened to the naval aviation of Japan. In that month Prince Takehiko of Yamashina, a member of the royal family, joined the aviation corps at the naval base at Yokosuka. He is the first prince of the blood to take up aviation since the foundation of the empire, and this incident is attracting a great deal of interest. His connection seems almost to crest the profession with a patent of nobility in the eyes of the younger generation of navy officers, and flying may yet be made one of the most aristocratic (as well as expensive) sports of the people of Nippon.

Perhaps the two most epochal events in the history of aviation in Japan were (1) the dispatch of the Japanese aeronautical mission to the Italian front in August of 1918. The mission returned to Japan in the summer of the following year. The actual war-time experiences which the members of this mission enjoyed with the crack Italian flyers proved valuable and abiding. Then (2) early in 1919 sixty airmen of the French army, headed by Colonel Fauré, visited Japan for the purpose of instructing the Japanese flyers. And the contribution of these French flyers to the development of aviation in Japan will always be remembered as among the most important gifts we have received from abroad. After all, however, the most picturesque things the Japanese eyes have seen performed among the clouds came from American visitors. The young flyer Smith, who visited us in 1916, made a tremendous impression on the popular mind of the Japanese by his spectacular stunts in the air. It was he who opened the eyes of Japan to the realization of the state of our aviation. And now the recent visit of the Flying Circus from Los Angeles is likely to put another white stone in the air lane up which Japan is slowly but steadily toiling.

Miss Mori, Japan's leading actress, knows the worth of applause to a striving artist



Possessed of But Few Airplanes and Still Fewer Aviators, Japan Is Behind the Rest of the World in Aviation, but Willing to Catch Up

K. ADACHI PHOTO

The first and only aviator among Japanese princes of the blood royal. Prince Takehiko of Yamashina in front of his favorite machine

K. ADACHI PHOTO

There is nothing of Poo-Bah in old Baron Okuma. He did not find his "family pride" an obstacle to entertaining a mere traveling circus